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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 002337

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: RULING PARTY STEPS UP ATTACKS AGAINST NGOS

REF: HARARE 2311

Classified By: Political Officer Audu Besmer for reasons 1.5 b/d

SUMMARY:

1. (C) A recent ZANU-PF theft of WFP food in Nsiza and GOZ orders to halt NGO food distribution in Binga come amid a looming general GOZ crackdown on NGOs. In mid September the GOZ issued a notice for all NGOs to register with the Ministry of Social Welfare, or cease operations. It appears that the GOZ is cracking down on NGOs that embarrass or are critical of government. A tightening crackdown against NGOs distributing food under the WFP program would be the most troubling, as it would lead to starvation. End Summary.

RULING PARTY DISRUPTS NGO FOOD DISTRIBUTION

2. (U) On October 4 local authorities ordered Save the Children U.K. to halt food distribution in the Matabeleland North town of Binga, five months after forcing the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) to stop distribution efforts in the same town. Authorities accused both organizations of supporting the opposition MDC--a charge they both deny as contrary to their policy of political neutrality. However, according to a Catholic priest in Binga, two CCJP volunteers who did community organizing and food distribution work in the Binga area, and were paid a stipend of ZWD\$5,000 (about US\$5.00) per month, won MDC council seats in the September rural council elections. Zimbabwe Country Director of Save the Children, UK., Chris McIvor, met with the Minister of Social Welfare and other GOZ officials last week and is optimistic about restarting their food distribution in Binga soon. Tarcisius Zimbiti, Zimbabwe Country Director of the CCJP, said he was waiting for the "dust to settle" before pursuing a restart of their feeding programs. According to Chris Bowley, Emergencies Manager at Save the Children UK., Binga has not received food for the past two months. On October 16, the independent Daily News reported that two people in Binga had died recently of starvation, and that school children were fainting at their desks from hunger.

3. (U) On October 18, ZANU-PF supporters in Insiza stole three metric tons of food from WFP implementing partner the Organization of Rural Associations for Progress (ORAP), and distributed it to ZANU-PF supporters. WFP halted all food distribution in Insiza and requested assurances from GOZ against further incidents of this kind. Insiza will host a parliamentary by-election on October 26-27. (More details on this incident are provided reftel).

CRACKDOWN ON NGOS

4. (C) The Insiza theft, and Binga halt orders come amid a general crackdown on NGOs and moves to control their activities. Recently addressing the 51st ordinary session of the ruling party, President Mugabe acknowledged the integral role of NGOs in assistance programs, but accused some NGOs of inappropriately campaigning for a change of the 'elected' government. On October 18, the state-controlled newspaper The Herald, reported the Minister of Social Welfare, July Moyo as saying there were some NGOs whose agenda was mainly to destabilize the country and the government was not going to allow such covert activities. The state-controlled newspaper, The Sunday Mail, and The Herald, have recently carried a barrage of criticism of Amani Trust, a prominent human rights organization which counsels torture victims and publicizes human rights violations, for being funded by the UK. and U.S. and for "being involved in the politics of Zimbabwe." On October 13, Information Minister Jonathan Moyo was quoted in The Sunday Mail as saying, "we must now do something about all these NGOs which are receiving British dirty money to destabilize Zimbabwe."

5. (C) In mid September the GOZ issued a notice requiring all NGOs to register with the Ministry of Social Welfare under the Private Voluntary Organizations (PVO) Act, or cease operations. The registration process takes about 8 months and NGOs complain it allows the GOZ to direct their programs by giving the GOZ access to NGO budgets, funding sources, and

allowing GOZ representation on NGO governing boards. Most NGOs are currently registered as trusts with the Registrar of Deeds and enjoy relative freedom from formal GOZ control. The PVO Act, which has been in force in current form since 1996, is very broad, covering any organization providing social services, development or relief assistance, or legal aid. Some private companies might be covered, but trusts, churches, schools, and health services providers are excepted. There are differing interpretations over which organizations the Act actually covers. Most NGOs have ignored the registration requirement but it is clear that the GOZ now intends to enforce it. To clarify enforcement issues, the Attorney General's office is re-drafting the legislation and is supposed to have a version ready in the coming weeks. (Note: While the National Association of NGOs (NANGO) has submitted language, the AG's office has not consulted formally with any NGOs and it seems likely, given the high-profile politics of this issue, that the new legislation will be even more draconian than the present. End Note.)

COMMENT:

16. (C) It appears that the GOZ intends to crack down on NGOs it considers thorns in its side--those that are openly critical of government, that publicize information which embarrasses the government or that the government does not fully control. The GOZ also appears unwilling to tolerate NGOs with any connection to the MDC, although it does not apply the same standard to NGOs who employ, or are connected to ZANU-PF members. Many organizations funded by the U.S. Government which play a key role in treating human rights victims and keeping space open for expression of alternative views are likely to comprise the hit list. Most NGOs with which we cooperate are biding their time, hoping their input into the new law will make it palatable. If this effort fails, we suspect they will try to find a way around the registration requirement or go underground.

17. (C) Further attacks, and a tightening crackdown against NGOs distributing food under the WFP program would be the most troubling, as slowing or halting their operations would most likely lead to starvation in affected areas. End Comment.
SULLIVAN